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STATINTL

Fulbright's Reservation Was Valid

JOHAN A. McCONE, a wealthy California Republican with an oil and shipping background, served in President Truman's administration from 1950 to '51 as undersecretary of the Air Force. From 1958 to '61 he served in the Eisenhower administration as chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission. The Senate confirmed his appointment unanimously for each of these posts, there was and is no question of his ability or dedication to public service.

With this preface we must express some reservations, which we hope are groundless, on his appointment as director of the Central Intelligence Agency. The Senate has confirmed this appointment too, but with 12 senators opposing as against 71 supporting confirmation.

Senator Margaret Chase Smith, the outspoken Republican lady from Maine, explained her negative vote partly: "I do not consider him qualified for this very important post." The only other Republican opposing him, Francis H. Case of South Dakota, was less explicit: "Will his instincts be free from his background?" Presumably this referred to C.I.A. decisions that might possibly bear on oil and shipping interests.

The more valid objection is that voiced by Senator William J. Fulbright (D-Ark.), chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. It is that neither he nor his committee was consulted about the appointment, and had not been informed of Mr. McCONE's views on foreign policy.

The C.I.A., said Senator Fulbright, "exerts a powerful influence on the character and conduct of our foreign relations without being subject to the processes of consultation and review of its activities."

The implication is that the C.I.A. might follow policies of its own at variance with those of the State Department, depending on the attitude of the director. The danger is lessened if President Kennedy is determined to keep a tight rein on both his Secretary of State and the C.I.A. director (in some contrast to President Eisenhower's attitude toward John Foster Dulles and his brother Allen, who occupied the respective posts).

Nevertheless, it would have been reassuring if the Senate Foreign Relations Committee had been able to explore Mr. McCONE's own views.